

Patchwork Family by TheAddict4Dramatics

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Summary: A series of one-shots of interactions/moments between various members of the Byers-Hopper clan.

1. Getting Caught (Hopper & Jonathan)

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me except the mistakes as this is un-beta'd.

Author's note: This is going to be a series of one-shots of interactions/moments between various members of the Byers-Hopper clan. Most probably all unrelated and random and jumping around time frames. Basically it's a hot mess!

Happy reading.

Patchwork Family

Chapter One: Hopper and Jonathan – Getting Caught

Joyce stirred and came too slowly as her mattress dipped under a sudden weight. She opened her eyes and saw Hopper sitting on the edge of the bed, regarding her with an open fondness in his eyes that made her stomach flutter slightly. She didn't really know what this thing was between them yet but she did know at times he made her feel like a giddy school girl, *again*.

"What time is it?" She inquired quietly. He was dressed, albeit a little haphazardly, and clearly about to sneak out so it must have been later than she thought. They'd both drifted off to sleep after they'd had their fun.

"Just after one. I have to get going." Hopper replied. He reached out a hand and stroked the side of her face, brushing some hair behind her ear as he did. It felt so nice the next words slipped out of her mouth before she could stop them:

"Don't go... stay."

She saw Hopper stiffened slightly at her words and regretted them instantly. It was her fault that he was having to sneak out in the middle of the night anyway – she was the one insisting they kept whatever this was under wraps and not tell anyone, including the kids. He'd quite happily stay over with Jane in tow and all sit around

the breakfast table the next morning. It was Joyce that wasn't ready for that.

"I can't. I have to get back to Jane. You know she'll worry if I don't." He told her in the same quiet and steady tone of voice. She knew he was being kind to her saying that and not calling her out on being a hypocrite for even asking him to stay in the first place.

"I'm working a late shift on Thursday..." She told him coyly. She was hoping the unspoken offer would make up for her thoughtlessness.

If she was working a late shift she didn't start till lunchtime. The boys would be at school in the morning and Hopper would arrive very late to work, taking a detour to Joyce's and making good use of the empty house. She felt relieved when he smirked in response to her statement, his eyebrows kinking suggestively.

"Thursday it is then." Hopper kissed her softly. And then again just because he could. She was aware she was smiling like an idiot once more. "Sleep well Joy." He told her softly as he placed one last kiss to her hairline and then rose from the bed.

"Get home safe." She said, barely managing to contain a yawn as she did so. She was exhausted from another full on week and it was only Tuesday. She knew she'd be asleep again in seconds.

Hopper exited the room as quietly as he could, closing the door slowly and silently. He turned around and almost jumped out of his skin as he was met with an equally shocked looking Jonathan standing on the other side of the hall. Jonathan had one hand on his bedroom door handle and his shoes in the other hand, exactly how Hopper was holding his own shoes. It was obvious Jonathan was sneaking back into his own room as Hopper was sneaking out of Joyce's.

"What are you doing here?" Jonathan asked in a whisper that was equally confused and worried.

Hopper being called to his house in the middle of the night was never going to be a sign of anything good but then nothing seemed awry in the silent house and now he thought of it Hopper's blazer wasn't

parked out front. It was only then that he took in the Chief of police's appearance – his clothes looked like they had been thrown on, in the dark or in a hurry or possibly both, and he was holding, not wearing, his shoes for presumably the same reason Jonathan was –to make as little noise as possible. It suddenly became sickeningly obvious exactly why Hopper was there. Hopper closed his eyes and visibly winced as Jonathan put two and two together.

Jonathan all but leapt at Hopper, dropping his shoes in the process and squaring up aggressively to the taller man. Hopper held him away from himself easily, his grip on Jonathan's shirt firm but not excessively so, just enough to keep him at arm's length.

"Alright kid, alright!" Hopper hissed insistently. He was trying to be as quiet as possible to not wake up Will or Joyce for that matter but he was also trying to save himself getting hit in the face by a severely pissed off looking eighteen year old.

Hopper gestured in the direction of the kitchen, clearly indicating they should go there to talk. Jonathan shrugged off Hopper's grip and continued to stare daggers at him but did eventually turn and walk in the direction of the kitchen.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Jonathan demanded as soon as Hopper joined him in the kitchen. His voice was still quiet as to not wake up the others but the anger was more than clear in it. Jonathan continued before Hopper had the chance to reply. "With everything she has been through the last couple of years you really think what she needs right now is to be messed around and used by you?!"

Hopper's back stiffened at the accusation. He knew Jonathan was angry and he honestly couldn't blame him for that, he'd have certainly responded in the same way if he'd been in his shoes, but the idea that he was using Joyce in any way made his blood boil.

"It's not like that kid." He responded, grounding out the words between his teeth and trying to stay calm.

"Sure it isn't." Jonathan accompanied his statement with a sarcastic laugh and Hopper felt the hold on his temper slipping from him

quickly. "It's only ever like that with you, isn't it? Everybody knows your reputation... ever since you got ba..."

Jonathan was cut off as Hopper shoved him aggressively into the refrigerator, he got right up into his face, grabbing fistfuls of the younger man's shirt. Jonathan looked surprised; there was the smallest flicker of fear in his eyes but he stood his ground, meeting Hopper's hard stare without blinking. Hopper was metres taller than him and more than a little heavier but Jonathan refused to be intimidated. He had to hand it to the kid – he had some serious balls. His anger dissipated at once and he let go of Jonathan's shirt and took a step back, holding his hands up in surrender.

"I'm sorry." He told him sincerely. Jonathan stepped away from the fridge and brushed himself down but he didn't reply. An uncomfortable silence surrounded them.

Hopper was feeling guiltier and guiltier with each passing second. He had been a fraction away from getting really physical with him – bringing up his reputation, the things he had done in those dark, dark years after Sara was gone, had made him lose control. He had almost hit him just like Lonnie had done countless times. He felt sick at the comparison his brain had just made. This couldn't be going any worse.

"I'm sorry Jonathan... but it's not like that with me and your mom, truly it's not." Jonathan looked up at him. He didn't look as pissed off anymore but now his expression was unreadable. "The only reason we're sneaking around is because your mom's not ready to tell people yet. When she is we will." Still he was met with the same blank stare. "I know it's probably weird and uncomfortable for you but you'll have to get used to it because I'm not going anywhere... I love her."

That finally granted him a response. Jonathan's eyes widened at the declaration and he took an unconscious step forward.

"Do you mean that?"

"Yeah, I do." Hopper confirmed. He was inwardly wincing the whole time though. God alone knew why he had just confessed that. He just couldn't think of any other way to prove Jonathan's (most likely

entirely fair) assumptions wrong.

Jonathan sighed deeply, clearly still deeply uncomfortable with the situation. Again Hopper couldn't blame him for that. Then Jonathan squeezed his eyes shut with his fingers, deep in thought. Finally he dropped his hand and squared his shoulders as if he had come to a decision about whatever it was he was pondering. Hopper suddenly felt nervous.

"Okay." Jonathan stated simply.

"Okay?"

"Okay I'll keep your secret and I won't say anything to mom because it will upset her that I found out this way but I swear..." At once Jonathan was moving towards Hopper his finger pointed in his direction, "... if you ever hurt her..."

"Hey, I know." Hopper replied as he and the younger man came face to face once more. "I get it. And I'd expect nothing less."

Jonathan nodded curtly, satisfied that his threat had been understood and taken seriously. He took a couple of steps back, creating a more natural space between them as Hopper gathered his things ready to leave. Once Hopper had put on his boots and stood up to leave he suddenly smiled at Jonathan.

"Oh and I'll keep your secret too." Hopper said.

"What secret?"

"Well I'm going to assume that neither yours nor Nancy's mom know that you're sneaking around with each other until one am?" Jonathan reddened instantly at Hopper's words which just made him smile all the more. After a moments silence Jonathan shook his head slowly and he figured that was about as much of an answer that he was going to get on that. "No okay well hey no judgement here just... promise me you're being safe yeah?"

Jonathan's eyes almost burst out of his head at Hopper's words. This entire conversation had been one of the most uncomfortable of his life and it had just got worse. Was this the sort of thing older male

figures talked to you about? Jonathan didn't know – he wasn't exactly overcome with them in his life. He was fairly sure if his own father had stayed around he wouldn't have bothered to have this particular chat with him. He would have found it more amusing to watch Jonathan try and figure it out on his own.

Still there was something about Hopper asking him, probably because he had just discovered him sneaking out of his mom's bedroom, that got his back up a little bit. It was on the tip of his tongue to reply something along the lines of 'I could ask you the same question'. But he stopped himself – he absolutely did not want to think about Hopper and his mom together in any way.

Hopper sighed in frustration next to him. He was clearly equally uncomfortable.

"Look I'm not prying kid I'm just saying... okay?" Jonathan nodded but stayed silent. "If you do ever need *anything* and you don't want to get it yourself you know where I am. And that will sure as hell be an awkward conversation but it will be entirely less awkward than you having to tell your mom you got Nancy pregnant at eighteen, you got it?"

"Yeah I got it." Jonathan replied. He hadn't looked Hopper in eye since he had brought up the subject. Hopper turned to leave and just as he reached the door he heard Jonathan say: "Thanks chief."

He turned to see Jonathan regarding him with a mixture of confusion and gratitude as if he couldn't understand why he'd go out of his way to look out for him like that. Hopper was suddenly reminded of who his father was and what his past experience had been. Jonathan wasn't used to anyone, other than Joyce, looking out for him in any way. It made an odd sort of feeling rise in his chest, something that he recognised from long ago with Sara and much more recently with Jane – it was a sort of protectiveness, a paternal protectiveness. He had a base instinct to want to protect the kid in front of him that had had to grow up so quickly.

And that was the first time he realised it wasn't just Joyce that he was falling in love with, it was all of them, the whole package.

Hopper paused with his hand on the door handle. He gave Jonathan a genuine smile.

"Anytime kid."

And he meant it.

2. Coming Out (Hopper & Will)

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me except the mistakes as this is un-beta'd.

Author's note: Just a warning there's some period-typical homophobia in this one but also a happy ending so...

Patchwork Family

Chapter Two: Hopper and Will – Coming Out

By the time Hopper had managed to get away from the station and to the school it was about forty minutes after the end of the day. The parking lot was nearly empty bar a few teacher's vehicles and a very worried looking Jane and Mike.

This day had been a weird one. A load of annoying, strange incidents at work, not Upside Down/Mind Flayer kind of strange but still irritating enough and then he had got a phone call from the school to say he had to come and meet the principle about Will. Now if it was about Jane he may not have been so surprised – she wasn't exactly a rebel but she had a bit of a temper on her and that got her into trouble sometimes. But Will. He couldn't remember Will ever being in trouble in school about anything.

Jane and Mike didn't know what had happened. They had waited for Will after school only to be told he was in the principal's office with Peter a boy from their science class. Apparently Peter had left about twenty minutes ago with his parents and as Jane had put it 'it did not look good'. So Hopper had sent Jane and Mike home and headed inside still none the wiser.

When he entered the principal's office he saw the principal sitting behind his desk looking serious and grey-faced even. Will was sitting the other side of the table, sunk low into his chair as if he was hoping it might swallow him up, with his eyes cast resolutely down. He could tell the kid had been crying and felt instantly protective.

"Sorry I took so long." Hopper said addressing the principal.

"Of course not Chief Hopper. You do important work." The principal replied with genuine feeling. Hopper didn't know why but he instantly disliked the guy. He didn't think he'd ever met him before, Jane's troublemaking had never been serious enough to get him pulled in in front of the head, but first impressions the guy seemed like a self-important dick to him.

"I thought you said you were going to call my mom." Will suddenly exclaimed. He sounded anxious and he refused to look in Hopper's direction even though Hopper was staring at him trying to work out what the heck was going on.

"I did call your mother Mr. Byers but I was unable to get hold of her so I called your father instead and he said he'd come in."

"He's not my father, he's just my mom's husband." Will retorted, clearly pissed off though when Hopper looked closer he realised the pissed off was more of a cover for Will being visibly upset again.

Hopper would be lying if he said that didn't hurt a little bit. It wasn't like he had gone in all guns blazing trying to be the father figure Will had never had. But he had thought that he and Will had built a meaningful relationship over the last couple of years. He thought they had grown close, close enough for Will not to be freaking out that he was here instead of Joyce.

"Can't we just wait for my mom to get here?" Will asked, or more accurately pleaded with the principal.

"If you didn't want people to know Mr. Byers then you shouldn't have done it in the first place." Was the cold reply. He was looking at Will as if he were sickened by him in some way and that was not helping to warm him to Hopper.

"What the hell is going on?" Hopper demanded suddenly.

He wanted to know what was making Will so upset and why that douchebag on the other side of the desk was regarding his kid as if he had come from another planet. Will had had enough of that after he had disappeared. He didn't need more of it now and from an adult that should have known better.

The principal gestured for Hopper to take a seat, which he did, seating himself next to Will who in turn physically flinched away from the close proximity to him and sunk even further into his seat. Hopper was beginning to get a sense of dread building in his stomach. Whatever this was it was serious.

"Will was caught *fornicating* with another student today after the lunch period." The principal informed Hopper gravely as if he had just passed on the news that someone had died. There was a beat of silence before Hopper burst out laughing. The principal's eyes widen in surprise at Hopper's response.

"Is that it?!" Hopper asked still chuckling before turning to face Will. "God I thought you had killed someone or something..."

"No Chief Hopper I'm afraid that is not it." The principal interrupted, he had raised his voice slightly to be heard over Hopper's laughter and Hopper fell silent again. "The other student in question was another *male* student."

The silence hung heavy in the air around them. Out of the corner of his eye Hopper saw Will tensing his hands on the chair beside him, his fists clenched together so hard he must have been digging his own nails into his skin. Will's leg was bouncing nervously and Hopper was fairly sure his entire body was trembling. A complete stranger could have realised that Will's anxiety levels were off of the chart at the moment and it killed Hopper to see him so distressed. He needed to get him out of this office as soon as he could.

Hopper took a deep breath to try and keep himself as calm as possible.

"And?" He asked, surprising himself even with how nonchalant he sounded. He was aware of Will whipping his head round to gape at him in shock but he didn't dare turn to look at him.

"And?!" The principal repeated. He, in contrast, was the very opposite of nonchalant. He sounded utterly outraged. "Look I don't know what type of thing you were used to when you lived in the big city but here in Hawkins we will not accept this kind of *perversion*..."

"Perversion?!" Hopper yelled as he leant forward and slammed his fist on the desk. The principal jumped back in surprise, looking more than a bit scared. Good thought Hopper. Let the bastard be scared. "Are you calling my kid perverted?"

The principal took several moments to calm himself before he answered but Hopper remained hunched forward over the desk the entire time. It wasn't a subtle intimidation tactic but it pleased him no end that it appeared to be working.

"Look all I need from you is... is a reassurance that you and his mother will... ad... address the issue so this does not happen again." The principal explained, nervously tripping over his words on several occasions.

Hopper leant back from the desk, reclining in his chair as a slow, sarcastic smile spread its way across his face.

"Well then consider yourself reassured – we'll definitely address the issue." Hopper stood and turned towards Will. He was looking up at him with a mixture of fear and surprise painted across his features. "Come on Will, we're leaving." He told him softly, his voice in complete contrast to what it had been only seconds before.

As they exited the building Will all but sprinted his way across the abandoned school grounds towards the car. Hopper broke into a slow jog to try and catch him up but was struggling to do so – he was a little out of shape and the only one not sixteen in this situation so he knew he wouldn't be able to catch Will if he really put his mind to out running him.

"Will wait up!" He called after him but to no avail. "Will seriously will you stop for a second please." Hopper tried again. He was clearly panting now and beginning to worry about just how unfit he appeared to be. Still Will continued his quick march away from the building. Hopper couldn't blame him for wanting to be as far away from what had just happened as possible but they needed to talk about this.

"Will stop!" Hopper yelled a third time and to his surprise he did.

Will remained facing away from him as he closed the distance between them. As he got closer he saw that Will was crying again, more so than before, almost sobbing with his eyes squeezed shut and his whole body tensed. Hopper wanted to turn back and go and pound the asshole principal into the ground for making Will feel that way. But there was something he wanted to do even more than that and in the end that's what he went for – he pulled Will into him, wrapping his arms around him in what Joyce had come to coin as his 'signature bear hug'. It was a strong embrace, full of love and comfort but still Will was completely rigid in his arms. He was crying so much he was struggling to breathe and Hopper could feel his shirt getting wetter and wetter through the tears. He felt himself tear up a little at seeing how utterly tormented Will was by this.

"Don't you hate me now?" Will suddenly choked against his shoulder.

Hopper was pretty sure he felt his own heart break at that moment. That's what Will was worried about? That he was going to hate him for this?

"No I don't hate you, you idiot." Hopper told him gently. He leant down further to ensure that Will would be able to hear his next words clearly: "I love you. You're my kid."

Will became instantly still against him, his crying ceasing at once. He pulled back to look up at him as if couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"Really?" Will sniffed. Hopper nodded and offered him a small but genuine smile.

That did it – Will began crying again and almost threw himself back into Hopper's arms. Will was definitely hugging him back this time, clinging to him fiercely to which Hopper gladly reciprocated. They stayed like that for several moments. Hopper held him and allowed him to cry, not saying anything until the tears had begun to slow a little. Hopper took a deep breath, trying to figure out how best to word what he wanted to say.

"This is a small town Will," he began, still talking gently. Will raised

his head to look up at him though still very much in his embrace. "It's full of small minded people like that asshole in there. So if you're not ready for people to know then you've just got to be a little more careful okay?" Will furrowed his brow in confusion. "I mean you've got a perfectly good bedroom at home don't you?"

"No." Will denied instantly, shaking his head for good measure. "No, mom can't find out. You can't tell her. Please! She worries about me enough already." The edge of panic was back in Will's voice just as it had been when Hopper had first arrived in the office.

"I'm not going to tell her but hate to break it to you bud she already knows. And I'm willing to bet quite a lot that Jonathan does too." Will's eyes widened until they resembled saucers and in any other situation Hopper may have laughed at that. He could tell Will didn't quite believe him though so he continued: "They've known you your whole life. Lived with you, known you better than anyone. They probably figured it out before you did."

"But they never said anything."

"That's because they were waiting for you to be ready to tell them. It's what people that love you do."

"And they don't mind?" Will asked still sounding so unsure as if Hopper was playing some big joke on him and was about to start looking at him like the principal had and would throw him out of the house, never let him see his family again. It may have been irrational but it had been his fear for months ever since he had come to truly understand who he was.

"Of course they don't mind. Neither will anyone that truly cares about you and trust me kid everything that's happened in the last few years has proven you aren't short of those."

At last Will's body language seemed to relax a little. He took a big, shuddering breath that stopped his tears altogether and wiped at eyes and nose with the back of his hand. As he brought his arms down his shoulders didn't stay raised up around his shoulders anymore. He puffed out another breath of air and suddenly appeared exhausted. Exhausted and emotional still but not distraught which Hopper would

take any day.

"I've been so worried." Will confessed quietly.

"I know kid." Hopper replied. He didn't know of course, couldn't possibly understand what Will was feeling and going through but he could see how much of a big deal it was to him. "There is another option... if you're not ready to bring this guy back to the house..." Will looked up at him. "I still have my cabin in the woods. It's empty now since me and Jane moved in with you guys and you won't bump into anyone you don't want to out there. I could loan you keys?"

"You'd do that for me? Seriously?" Will asked in astonishment. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. What Hopper was offering was heaven to him – privacy, real privacy to figure things out and to get know Peter properly where they didn't have to pretend to be anything else.

"Yeah, sure. As long as you promise me you're being safe?" Will looked at him in confusion once again and Hopper swallowed hard. Looks like he was going to have to have this conversation again. "Look I know no one can accidentally get anyone else pregnant in your situation but you still need to take precautions to make sure you both stay safe and healthy."

Will's cheeks reddened instantly as he caught Hopper's meaning. He looked down, unable to meet his eye. No one had ever had this kind of talk with him, not even Jonathan but then if Hopper was right and he had known about this for a while perhaps he thought it wasn't necessary. Will had assumed that might be one of the only advantages of coming out as a teenage boy – that any father figure types in his life would not feel the need to have this particular conversation with him. Clearly he had been wrong. And trust Hopper to break the mould on that one and go right ahead to defy his expectations in every way.

After a couple of moments of awkward silence Hopper began to laugh gently. Will looked up at him sheepishly.

"Sorry kid it's just you look exactly like Jonathan did when I had this conversation with him." Will smiled in response – perhaps he really

wasn't that different from everyone else.

"What? The conversation about taking another boy back to the cabin?" Will teased to which Hopper only continued to laugh.

"Not exactly that no."

"Thanks Dad." Will said suddenly once their laughter had come to a natural end.

Hopper's eyes widened in surprise at the use of the name. Will had never used it before. He didn't mind one bit, in fact he was thrilled, he was just surprised. It seemed inadequate to Will – a simple thanks to express how completely grateful he felt to Hopper for everything that had just transpired between them. He hadn't meant to call him that, it had just slipped out, but he didn't regret it and he figured it might make up for his earlier comment about Hopper being 'just his mom's husband'. He hadn't mean it and he hoped Hopper knew that. Though considering the tears that Hopper was currently trying to blink away he realised he probably did know it.

"What do you say to some ice cream on the way home?" Hopper offered, trying to deflect from how emotional he had suddenly become. These kids would be the death of him he was sure.

"Sure." Will agreed.

They walked back towards the car, side by side this time and with Hopper's arm linked over Will's shoulder. Father and son.

3. Being Ready (Joyce & Jane)

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me except the mistakes as this is un-beta'd.

Author's note: This takes place the same night as another fic I wrote that is published on this site called 'Doing It Properly'. It's not overly related but if you wanted a little more context to this then please do check it out.

Happy reading.

Patchwork Family

Chapter Three: Joyce and Jane – Being Ready

"Thank god we're finally alone." Hopper murmured as he leant down and brushed his lips against the back of Joyce's neck. He kicked his foot out behind him to close their bedroom door. Joyce dropped her handbag onto the bed and turned to face him, looking up at him and smiling about how dramatic he sounded.

"Was it really that bad?"

She knew neither of them had wanted a big white wedding, they'd both been there before and that's why they'd pulled their little New York twenty-four hour chapel stunt in the first place. But it had meant a lot to the kids that they do it properly – a room full of friends and family, a big cake, a first dance, the whole shebang – and she was glad they had done it. And not just for the kids, she'd had a great night too.

"No it wasn't bad at all..." Hopper replied. He was looking at her as if he wanted to devour her and it was utterly distracting. "I've just been unable to think straight every time I looked at you in that dress. Do you have any idea how good you look in that thing?" He asked her seriously as he closed the distance between them and wrapped his arms around her.

He kissed away the small blush that appeared on her cheeks at his

compliment. She was hardly bashful around him anymore but something about the intensity of emotion with which he had been watching her all night was making her feel almost shy. She snorted at the thought of herself as the blushing bride. That couldn't have been further from the truth. And yet still she had unexpected butterflies fluttering lightly in her stomach.

Hopper kissed her soundly, his hands anchoring her face against his. His caresses were passionate but not rushed and with just the right amount of pressure. She smiled into his lips – he really was rather good at this. He had a way of kissing her that made it feel as if nothing else in the world existed except the two of them. It was the ultimate escapism.

He led her back and onto the bed slowly, still standing himself and towering over her to bestow more kisses to her lips, jawline and neck. He rose and took a couple of steps back as he reached for his belt and started to undo it, watching her all the while with the same hungry intensity in his eyes. Joyce swallowed hard. Something about him really was affecting her tonight – she felt as if she were seventeen again.

"No don't..." He told her softly as she reached for the straps of her dress. "Leave it on."

Her stomach spiked in anticipation at his words. It wasn't what he usually went for – clothes were normally discarded as early as possible and thrown into every corner of the room when they got down to it. She had no intention of denying him though. She was excited at the idea of it, even if the more logical part of her brain argued they may struggle with the practicalities of this particular dress.

Joyce did her best to keep her face neutral, her eyebrow arching suggestively at him.

"This was expensive." She told him coolly but he only smirked in response.

"I'll be careful."

"Really, because you don't seem in a very careful mood."

Hopper closed the gap between them once more, leaning down over her and brushing some of the hair from her shoulder to place a kiss there.

"I promise I'll do my best sweetheart. But I have to have you in this dress." He stated as if it were a clear and undeniable fact. Perhaps it was.

Joyce didn't answer. Instead she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled his lips onto hers in a crashing, hard kiss, pulling him down even further until he was on the bed with her, on top her and trapping her beneath him. They moved together with practiced ease – kissing, caressing and grinding against each other in all the right places that drove the other wild. They were both still fully clothed, save Hopper's belt, and once again Joyce felt as if she were a teenager again – pushing clothing to one side in stolen moments of intimacy in the back of Hopper's car.

She'd just reached her hand into the waistband of his underwear when their bedroom flew open without warning. They were frozen in surprise for a split second before they disentangled themselves from each other and turned to see who their intruder was.

"Damn it Jane you ever heard of knocking?!" Hopper yelled before Joyce could see who was in the doorway. As her husband moved to the side of her she saw he was in fact correct and Jane stood, hesitantly at the open door. Hopper's voice was angry but not angry enough to garner the reaction it did – Jane burst out crying. "Hey, what's the matter?" Hopper asked, his voice instantly softening. He was up from the bed in a second and making his way to her.

"Mom!" Jane exclaimed, pushing past him and all but tackling Joyce who remained seated on the bed. Joyce responded immediately, wrapping her arms around the younger woman and rocking her slightly as she continued to cry against her shoulder. She caught Hopper's worried look over the top of Jane's head and held the girl even tighter.

"It's okay baby. Shhh, it's okay." Joyce comforted softly as she

continued to rock Jane back and forth.

She was trying to wrack her brain as to what might have made Jane so upset. She didn't think she could have been asleep long enough to have suffered a nightmare – a common and totally understandable occurrence considering all Jane had gone through. And she had seemed happy all night at the party. Ecstatic even; she'd organised most of it herself and was seemingly enjoying all of her handy work coming to fruition. She'd been wrapped around Mike the whole night but that was hardly uncommon either recently. But as Joyce thought about it she remembered noticing Jane hadn't been so attached to his hip towards the end of the evening.

"Did you have a fight with Mike?" Joyce enquired softly. Hopper's eyes seemed to harden at the mere mention of the possibility and it only got worse when Jane confirmed this theory with a nod of her head. Hopper took a step towards them, his face murderous at the idea of that punk hurting his little girl, but he stopped in his tracks at the look Joyce gave him. "Why don't you go and make us some cocoa. And close the door." Joyce told him firmly in a tone of voice he knew better than to argue with. He figured it was probably best Joyce dealt with this anyway. He'd no doubt say the wrong thing and make her feel worse– having a fifteen year old daughter was an absolute minefield.

"It's just us now sweetheart. If you want to talk about it?.. What did you guys fight about?" Joyce asked, still speaking softly. She stroked the back of Jane's head and back as she spoke and Jane's tears began to slow. After a few moments of silence Jane took a big breath and answered quietly:

"Sex."

Joyce couldn't help but stiffen in surprise at the reply. Surely Jane and Mike weren't having sex already were they? She'd had 'the talk' with Jane last year before she and Hopper had moved in with them and Joyce had received a rather panicked and hilarious phone call from Hopper begging for help. Joyce had talked to Jane about the birds and the bees frankly and honestly, thinking that was the best way, but it had been a very theoretical, in the future type conversation then. Perhaps the future was now. Joyce gulped slightly

– Hopper was going to lose his mind when he found out.

"Are you and Mike... having sex?" Joyce asked gently. She was quite glad she wasn't looking at Jane in that moment. Jane shook her head and Joyce sighed in relief. But just as she did her next thought brought an even bigger sense of dread to her stomach. "Mike didn't try and... make you do it, did he?" She could barely bring herself to think about that possibility but she needed to know. Never mind Hopper she'd wring the kid's neck herself if that were the case.

"No. He wants to but I don't know if I want to or not so he said we should wait until I'm sure." Jane said quietly against Joyce's shoulder. Joyce smiled. She knew Mike was a good kid, and she certainly had to remind Hopper of that enough, but it was nice to hear she was right in that.

"Well I think Mike's right honey. You should wait until you're ready."

"But I'm scared! I just want to get it over with." Jane exclaimed suddenly. Her outburst caused her to start crying again and Joyce hugged her closer to herself, quietly waiting for her to be ready. "There's going to be stuff about it that I don't understand because there's always stuff I don't understand. I won't know what I'm doing. It'll be embarrassing." Jane explained, talking so quickly she tumbled over her words, trying to get them out as fast as she could.

Joyce took a couple of deep breaths, rubbing her hand up and down Jane's back to encourage her to do the same. It appeared to work as Jane calmed down a little. Joyce's heart went out to her adopted daughter – being in High School was difficult enough for anyone let alone someone that had Jane's history. She was constantly insecure about things she didn't understand or get. At least for once she wasn't alone or out of the ordinary for feeling that way, she just didn't know that yet.

"Sweetie everyone feels that way – I promise you you're not alone in thinking like that." Jane pushed her head away from Joyce to stare up at her, complete surprise covering her entire face. "No one knows what they're doing when they start having sex. Mike won't know what he's doing either. You figure it out together, that's the whole idea." Joyce smiled warmly at Jane and to her relief the girl offered a

little smile in return. The anxiety was starting to drain from her face. "But only when you're both ready." Joyce added firmly.

"How did you know when you were ready?"

"Honestly?" Jane nodded. She didn't know why she'd asked that question – of course Jane wanted honesty, that's all she ever wanted – friends don't like and all that and neither did family. "I didn't know. But I did it anyway and I ended up regretting it. Especially as a few months later I was in a different situation, a different guy and then I knew I was definitely ready. It felt so different – I was still nervous but not scared, like an excited nervous. Like I couldn't wait to be with him and I wished I had waited until then."

"Was that with Will and Jonathan's dad?"

"Lonnie? No. He came along a little while later." Joyce paused, unsure of whether she should continue or not. But then she had promised complete honesty and it was hardly a secret. "Actually that was with your dad."

"You and dad?.. in High School?" Jane asked, her eyes lit up in surprise and wonder. But then as the idea fully formed in her head her face scrunched up in unspoken disgust at the thought of her parents being together in that way. Joyce let out a little laugh – she was certainly a typical teenager in some ways.

"We were like you and Mike in High School – inseparable."

Jane smiled at the comparison. It was funny to think that Joyce and her dad were once like she and Mike were now. Funny but not in a bad way, actually she found the idea made her smile.

"What was he like back then?" Jane asked quietly, almost secretively as if she shouldn't be asking. She got the feeling he wouldn't be happy about them discussing him as a teenager. Or at least, he'd pretend he wasn't happy about it when actually he liked it.

"He was different – less grumpy. More carefree." Joyce answered truthfully. But then how could he have possibly been as carefree as he had been back then after everything that had happened. "But he

was also the same. He still made me laugh when I was feeling sad. And I could talk to him about anything. He looked after me when I needed it. No, we looked after each other." Joyce corrected herself. Neither of their parents had ever been that good at that. Joyce sometimes felt that she and Hopper had raised each other as teenagers.

"Amen to that." Both Joyce and Jane jumped at the sudden voice from the doorway. Hopper stood there, looking a little sheepish at his eavesdropping, and holding two steaming cups of hot cocoa. "Can I come in?"

Joyce waited for Jane to reply. Jane smiled and nodded and so Hopper brought in the drinks, placed them on the side and sat on the bed, the other side of Jane. At once she disentangled herself from Joyce and cradled herself into Hopper's side. Joyce didn't mind in the slightest – she loved seeing the bond between the two of them.

"So do I need to break the Wheeler kid's neck or what?" Hopper asked.

"Dad, no!" Jane exclaimed, pulling back to look at him with pleading eyes. She hadn't picked up on his sarcasm – another thing she didn't quite get but soon caught on when she saw his playful expression. She hit his arm and laughed. "No." She repeated, still laughing. Hopper pulled her in for another hug.

"Fine. But you're okay yeah?" He asked her seriously. She nodded into his side.

Hopper looked over the top of Jane's head to Joyce who smiled and nodded in confirmation, leaning forward to rub Jane's back a couple of times. Hopper couldn't help his brain conjuring up the worst scenarios when he saw her upset like that. But apparently sometimes all it needed was a hug and a chat with your mom to sort it all out. He was so glad Jane had found that bond with Joyce. Even if it meant his wedding night plans had just taken a serious detour. Somehow he wouldn't have it any other way.

4. Who Needs Him? (Joyce & Will)

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me except the mistakes as this is un-beta'd.

Author's note: I guess this could be seen as a little sequel to chapter two.

Happy reading.

Patchwork Family

Chapter Four: Joyce and Will – Who Needs Him?

"Morning sweetie!" Joyce greeted her younger son brightly as she entered the kitchen.

Will sat alone at the kitchen table, eating his cereal with one hand and flicking through a comic with the other. They had got into some kind of morning routine in the Byers-Hopper house since they had all moved in together the year previously. They had had to – five people all trying to get out to work and school first thing and only one bathroom between them required a bit of order to even be possible. Things had got slightly less hectic when Jonathan had moved to New York in the fall but that had been the same time Jane had started school and she certainly took longer in the bathroom than Jonathan had. Will usually got in and out of the bathroom as early as possible so he could enjoy his breakfast in peace whilst the other members of the household rushed around to get ready.

"Morning mom." He replied not looking up from his reading.

Joyce paused for a moment to ponder him sitting there so chilled and carefree – they'd come a long way from all of the trauma and heartbreak of the last couple of years. And even with, or more accurately because of, recent revelations Will had never seemed so happy. As always Joyce was already running late for work so could not afford the time to stare adoringly at her son, an act for which he would surely rebuff her in a moment anyway, so she sprang into action and set to the daily search for her car keys.

"They're in the dish by the front door." Will informed her casually, still not looking up.

"And that is why you are my unofficial favourite." Joyce teased as she retrieved her keys from said dish. She returned to the kitchen to put on her coat and bag. "Hey did you manage to fix your bike last night?" She'd worked a double yesterday so he'd already been in bed when she got home and she'd forgotten to ask Hopper. She was too exhausted to do anything expect eat the dinner her husband had left for her and fall into bed. And now she was straight back on it – no let up.

"Err no, it's something wrong with the chain or the chainstays..." Will explained with a face that clearly showed he didn't really understand what was wrong with it only that it wasn't working. "...anyway dad said he'd look at it with me at the weekend."

Joyce froze at the mention of Lonnie. She hadn't heard from him at all since Will had been missing, bar one incident in which he had turned up drunk as hell on her doorstep when the boys had been out and had been forcibly removed by Hopper. She tried to calm the rising panic that erupted in her stomach at the mere mention of his name – she had thought they'd gotten him out of their lives for good. She knew Will was old enough to make his own decisions about Lonnie but she couldn't bear the thought of having to deal with him again. And she knew he'd only end up disappointing or hurting Will – that's all he seemed capable of doing when it came to his children.

Will, totally oblivious to his mother's sudden anxiety continued to eat his breakfast in silence.

"Dad?" Joyce questioned at last when she had found her voice again. She did her best to sound casual but her voice still came out high and tight. "You spoke to dad?"

At last Will looked up from the table to look in Joyce's direction. She was sounding all weird and panicked all of a sudden and he couldn't think why. When he saw the stricken look on her face his confusion only increased until he finally figured out she didn't realise who he was actually talking about. He smiled and rolled his eyes a little – as if Lonnie would casually be calling him up to give him bike advice.

"I didn't mean dad, dad, you know Lonnie. I meant Hopper."

"Oh." Joyce sighed in relief, a thankful smile breaking over her face. No Lonnie. "Oh." She said again in a different tone as she fully realised what Will had just said. Since when was he calling Hopper dad? The smile on her face doubled at the thought but Will only rolled his eyes at her again in reply.

"Please don't make a big deal about it, he's not." Will stated. He couldn't help but feel slightly embarrassed by it and Joyce's wide, deliriously happy smile was not helping that feeling currently.

"I'm not!" Joyce denied, holding her hands up in surrender for good measure. She couldn't shake the smile from her face though.

"Anyway it's not as if dad – Lonnie I mean – would want anything to do with me now anyway is it? Not after everything that's happened recently." Will asked deliberately changing the subject. It was his turn to try and fail to sound casual in his question.

Joyce swallowed hard. She wasn't sure how to answer that. She knew exactly what Will meant – he had come out a couple of months before or more accurately had been forced out by the homophobic, dinosaur of a principal at the High School. It hadn't come as any big surprise to her; she'd always had her suspicions, a feeling she couldn't articulate but had always been there. And of course she hadn't cared in the slightest. She worried for him, worried that things might not be as straightforward for him as they would be for others, but they wouldn't have been straightforward for him either if he had pretended to be something he wasn't. And he had seemed genuinely happier since it had all come out, since he had realised everybody still loved him just the same.

Lonnie was another matter though. As she'd told Hopper when Will had first gone missing Lonnie was always getting at him for being different, calling him slurs such as 'fag' or 'queer'. Lonnie wasn't stupid and he was Will's father, he had picked up on the same thing Joyce had and his reaction to it clearly showed he didn't like it. There's no way Will could have forgotten what Lonnie used to be like but that didn't mean he wasn't trying to kid himself that things might be different now if Lonnie came back into their lives. It was only

natural he sought the approval of his biological father – even if it was unlikely he would ever actually get it.

"I don't know baby. I don't know how he would react." She supposed she was kidding herself too that Lonnie might have changed despite any evidence to support that.

"Yes you do, you're just being nice and trying to save hurting me. It's okay, I get it." Will told her, sounding despondent. He cast his eyes back down to his cereal as Joyce sighed. Screw that bastard that was still managing to hurt her family after all of this time.

"Well I doubt he would be open to it, no sweetie. But frankly fuck him." Will looked back up at his mother's use of language, his mouth hanging open slightly in shock. She never swore in front him or his siblings. "Who needs him? You've got me and Jonathan, Jane and Hop, and all of your friends. He doesn't want to be part of your life then that's his loss because you're doing fine without him. Good riddance."

Will smiled at Joyce's little outburst. He liked Hopper for many reasons – he had brought Jane into their lives, he took the time to be involved in his and Jonathan's lives and not just because he felt he had to, he had supported him unequivocally in the principal's office. But one of the things he liked most about Hopper is that he had given his mom a whole new lease of life, including a highly renewed sense of confidence. She walked around nowadays as if she could do anything and Will thought it was wonderful. He also knew it was almost entirely down to her new husband. It made all of the times Will had accidentally seen them making out (or worse) bearable. Hopper was undeniably good for his mom, even if they did need to learn to get a room.

"You're right, who needs him?" Will agreed with a nod of his head. Joyce continued to look at him intently, clearly trying to work out whether he was truly as okay with it as he was trying to sound. "I'm doing okay mom, I promise." He told her, an air of exasperation in his tone.

"Okay, good." Joyce replied, seemingly satisfied he was telling the truth. She walked over to him and kissed the top of his head. "I love

you sweetie."

"Love you too, mom."

For the second time that morning Joyce froze in shock. It was occasions that were very few and far between these days that he would admit such a thing out loud. Not that she truly blamed him – he was a High School student now and everyone knew it was impossible to think too well of your parents when you were in High School, let alone admit it out loud. She chanced her luck with another kiss to his head but this time he ducked and swatted her off – ah well back to normal.

"The front door is that way you know." Will teased as she headed back towards the bedrooms instead of to the front of the house.

"Yes I know smartass – I just left something in my room."

Hopper was just finishing getting dressed as Joyce re-entered the bedroom. He looked up from adjusting his belt and said, without pausing:

"I think they're in the dish by the front the door."

"Got them." Joyce replied, holding up her car keys to prove it.

She really did need to sort out this whole car key thing – it had become a long standing joke with the rest of her family; Jane had even offered to blindfold herself and search for them telepathically once which Will and Hopper found hilarious of course. Even if Joyce had wanted to be cross about it she couldn't bring herself to be when she saw how proud Jane was of herself for making her father and brother laugh so much.

Hopper smiled at the keys being jangled in front of him, Will had told her where they were no doubt because there's no way she would have remembered herself, especially after working a double last night. He continued to get ready even as Joyce stayed put and watched him. When he was done he turned to look at her expectantly:

"So Will just told me his *dad* was going to help him fix his bike this weekend." Joyce told him once he had finished moving.

"Don't make a big thing out of it."

"I'm not!" She replied, louder than she had intended. Why was everyone accusing her of that? Besides which it kind of was a big deal. Hopper raised his eyebrows at her outburst but he didn't say anything.

"It just sort of starting happening, you know after the whole principal thing. I'm just letting it pass without comment. I don't want him to get self-conscious or embarrassed about it." Hopper explained and instantly all the annoyance drained from her. Hopper was so good with the kids, so natural at being attuned to their needs and feelings. He really was a wonderful parent and she felt privileged to be doing it with him.

"But you're okay with it? You're happy?" She already knew the answer but she just needed to hear it to be sure.

"Happy? I'm fucking ecstatic!" Hopper exclaimed and Joyce's smile expanded once more. "I'm just trying to be cool about it. Though I'm also pretty sure he saw me cry a little the first time he said it so my tactic may be failing already."

Joyce laughed and walked over to him, reaching on her tiptoes to place a solid kiss to his mouth.

"I love how much you love them." She told him sincerely before she kissed him again, longer this time. He indulged her, kissing her back with slow, lazy caresses until she pulled away from him.

"You're so late for work." He told her softly, nothing but gentle teasing in his voice.

"Shit I know! Donald's going to kill me."

"See you tonight." Hopper called after her as she rushed for the door.

"Yeah, have a good one." Came the echoed reply as she sped down the corridor.

He always said 'see you tonight' even though there was a good chance she would see him before. He had taken to turning up at the store

around the time she was due lunch, usually with some kind of baked good in his hands that he had picked up on the way over. He knew she wasn't the best at insisting she had her break if they were busy and often couldn't be bothered to make lunch just for herself – she'd gotten so used to making lunches for the boys but now the kids were doing their own thing as far as that was concerned she didn't see the point in doing it for one. Hopper clearly did not agree and had started their little routine just to make sure she got a break and had some food.

Joyce was still smiling as she got into the car and started the engine. She didn't know why it made her so happy but then it was just further evidence of how well this whole thing was working. Somehow the five of them had fitted together like none of them had ever belonged anywhere else. It had almost been scary at the start, just how well it worked from the beginning. For the first time in her life Joyce had a happy, contented family. It was all she had ever wanted and she was desperately happy about it.

"Shit!" She exclaimed again as she saw the clock in the car and realised just how late she was. She sped out of the driveway, praying the roads would be clear.

5. Doing It Together (Hopper & Joyce)

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me except the mistakes as this is un-beta'd.

Happy reading.

Patchwork Family

Chapter Five: Hopper and Joyce – Doing It Together

"Morning Chief." Flo commented as Hopper entered the police house. The older woman still looked surprised to see him arrive before noon even though he had been doing that for almost two years now.

"Flo. Guys." Hopper greeted his secretary first and then his deputies that were, as usual, sitting with their feet up on their desks and playing cards. It was still Hawkins after all and just because he had finally gotten his act together it didn't mean there was an awful amount to do in the town – besides the annual saving of the world type stuff.

"Joyce Byers is in your office Chief." Flo told him quietly, as if it were a secret. "I told her I didn't know how long you'd be or what your morning schedule was but she insisted on waiting. She didn't say what it was about."

"Okay thanks Flo." Hopper replied casually as if that were a completely regular occurrence. It wasn't but it also didn't mean that something catastrophe had happened like it might have meant once. Flo gave him a knowing look that made him want to roll his eyes but he resisted. Besides, she wasn't wrong.

Hopper entered his office and saw Joyce sitting the other side of his desk, her back to him, and staring off into the distance, clearly lost in thought. That was Joyce – always thinking, always stewing about something. Her hair was pulled up into a loose ponytail at the top of her head. He loved her hair like that –it reminded him of how she used to wear it in High School and consequently reminded him of all the things they used to get up to in High School which he never shied

away from reminiscing about if he could help it.

As she heard him enter the room she swung her head round to look at him and offered him a small but genuine smile as she did so. He smiled back.

"Hey." He greeted as he closed the door behind him.

"Hey. How did it go?"

"Yeah fine. Good. As soon as we arrived and she saw Mike and Will and the others she rushed away, barely looked back. It will be me that'll be a nervous wreck all day." Hopper explained as Joyce gave him a sympathetic look.

It was Jane's first day of school today – the first day of High School for all of the kids. Hopper had taken Doctor Owen's advice and waited a year, or the best part of it, before letting Jane out into the world. She was raring to go of course and he couldn't blame her – she'd been shut up in that cabin for the best part of two years and in a much worse prison for eleven years before that. The last year since Joyce and the party had found out she was staying with Hopper had been better for her – there'd been gatherings at the cabin with the group, family movie nights at the Byers, and weekly tutoring from Nancy to help get her up to speed with schoolwork. Not to mention quite a few sleepovers at the Byers more recently. And she was ready, Hopper knew that, but it still scared him shitless that she was out there without him to protect her twenty-four-seven.

If there was one person that understood all of that it was Joyce. He was touched she'd come in, on her day off no less, to check how things had gone.

"Well don't tell on me but I've brought you a present." Joyce told him as she took out a packet of cigarettes from her pocket. She laughed aloud when she saw how much Hopper's eyes brightened at the sight.

They had both agreed to cut down on how much they smoked after mounting pressure from both of their children. Will had learnt about how bad smoking was for you in school and had quickly passed that information onto Jane. They had ganged up on the pair of them and

they really hadn't stood a chance. Still today was a stressful day so Hopper figured they deserved this treat. He took a cigarette from the packet that Joyce was holding open in front of him and quickly retrieved a lighter from the top drawer of his desk. He sighed deeply as he inhaled the first drag.

"You're an actual angel." He said sincerely as he exhaled the smoke dramatically. Joyce blushed slightly as he passed the cigarette to her and watched her take her first drag. She coughed a little as she always did the first time – she had brought the especially strong sort that he enjoyed so much and they were always a little much for her.

"What?" Joyce inquired softly as Hopper continued to gaze at her silently.

"I missed you last night."

The blush on her cheeks deepened and she looked down to avoid his eye. He loved how easy it was to make her bashful, almost as much as he loved how very *unbashful* she was at certain other times.

"You know what we agreed." She told him as she passed the cigarette back to him. He remained silent as he took another drag, still eying her mischievously. "It's not fair on Jane now she's started school... she needs to be in her own bed so she can get a good night's sleep. If she's in a steady routine it will help her settle in more easily." Joyce explained as if he may have genuinely forgotten what they had previously agreed on.

"Yeah I know all that. And I agree... doesn't mean I didn't miss you last night." This time his words produced a little smile from her as she took the cigarette from him again. He smirked at his achievement.

"We're not very good at taking things slow are we?" She asked him after a moments' pause. He looked at her in confusion so she continued. "When we first started..." She made a vague gesture between the two of them – apparently she was too shy this morning to even say the phrase 'sleeping together'. Hopper smiled once more. "We said we'd take things slow, just see what happens..."

Jane and he had stayed at her house six out of the last seven nights so no they weren't exactly keeping things casual but Hopper was more than happy with that. No one knew of their relationship, not even the kids. Well Jonathan did after an unfortunate incident in which he caught Hopper sneaking out of his mom's room but he was keeping his mouth firmly shut – Joyce still didn't know that he knew. Still, they'd gotten into a routine over the last couple of weeks of the summer that was entirely domestic and familial. The five of them (sometimes more if Nancy or Mike or some of the others were round) would eat dinner together every night and then the kids would watch movies whilst he and Joyce cleared away. After the kids had gone to bed they would find themselves falling into Joyce's bed, half the time not even to mess around just to cuddle and talk and doze until Hopper would make his way out to the couch at some point in the early hours and pretend that he had been there the whole time. And then in the morning they'd all have breakfast together before he and Joyce went to work, leaving the kids to enjoy the last few days of their summer break.

It was a far cry from the verbal agreement he and Joyce had had in the beginning to keep things casual and light but it had happened naturally and he had no desire to fight it. Perhaps Joyce did though.

She passed him back the cigarette and he turned to stub it out in the ashtray on his desk. He could do with the nicotine distraction right now but he needed a clear head for the conversation he may be about to have.

"Are you saying things are moving too fast for you?" Hopper asked seriously, trying to keep the slight panic he was feeling out of his voice.

"No." Joyce answered immediately and he couldn't help the sigh of relief that followed her answer. It was Joyce's turn to smirk at him. "It's just that's a little scary in itself."

"Come here." He requested, opening his arms to her. She rose from the chair and buried herself in one of his all-encompassing hugs. He left a couple of solid kisses to her hairline before seeking out her mouth to kiss her firmly there. His embraces made her feel so utterly comforted that she couldn't help but relax. "It's okay to be scared

about how absurdly attracted you are to me. That's natural." She snorted against his chest before pulling back.

"I should go... let you get on with some work." He made a face at the prospect of having to do said work and she smiled. Joyce lifted herself onto her tiptoes to kiss him goodbye. "See you later."

"Could you maybe call me later when Jane and Will get back to yours." He asked her uncertainly just as she had reached the door. She turned back to face him. They'd agreed Jane would go back to hers after school each day so she wasn't alone in the cabin and that he would come and collect her on his way home from work each evening.

"Sure."

"And maybe do it... you know... so they don't realise that you're calling me." He continued, still sounding unsure. He knew he was being protective to the point of overbearing with Jane but he also knew he'd go crazy if he had to wait all day without confirmation that everything was okay.

"I'll throw some treats into the back yard and then sneak away whilst they're distracted." Joyce teased, laughing a little at her own joke. "Hey if there's one person that understands wanting to know where and how your child is all of the time it's me. I'll call you as soon as they're back." She promised and Hopper nodded.

"Thanks... not just for today but for everything. I don't think Jane and I would have survived this last year without you." Hopper told her sincerely. He truly meant it – raising a teenager, a teenage girl when you're an unmarried middle aged single father no less, was an absolute mine field. But having Joyce at the other end of the phone was a lifeline to both him and his daughter. She always seemed to have the answers that calmed them both and soothed everything over. She had become a literal lifesaver to both of them and he wanted her to know that. She smiled widely at his remark.

"Yes you would have, you'd both have been fine."

"Well maybe." He reluctantly agreed. "But I wouldn't have wanted to

be. What I mean is... I'm glad we're in this whole parenting thing together. I'm glad I'm doing it with you, that we're doing it together."

Joyce's eyes widened at his remark. Were they doing this together? They were dating now, though that was a fairly new thing, but she still considered that she was raising her boys and he was raising Jane – separately. Whilst they may have helped each other out from time to time where parenting was concerned – Jonathan had gotten into the habit of going straight to Hopper if he had car trouble for example and not even bothering to ask Joyce who they both knew had no idea about cars. And sure Jane spoke to her about girls things she didn't want to talk to Hopper about... now she thought about it Will too seemed to seek Hopper out quite a lot and she could never get out of him what they spoke about beyond a very vague 'just guy stuff'. Not to mention the absurdly domestic, nuclear-family-like setup the five of them had managed to fall into over the last couple of weeks... fall into completely effortlessly. Hopper and Jane were round almost constantly but neither Will nor Jonathan had ever seemed put out by that in the slightest, not like Jonathan had been with Bob. It had all slotted into place so easily.

In an instant Joyce realised they were very much 'doing it' together. At some point along the line they had become co-parents to the same children and she knew it was long before they had started dating.

Hopper swallowed nervously at the prolonged pause.

"How's that for taking it slow?" He joked quietly, dipping his head to avoid her gaze. He was suddenly feeling mightily uncomfortable.

"I love you."

That made him look up. His head snapped up so quickly he was surprised he didn't break something. The exaggerated movement caused Joyce to smile at him, biting on her nail nervously as she did so.

"You just trying to outdo me or what?" He continued to jest. He had no idea what he was prattling on about or why he wasn't dropping to his knees and declaring his undying love back because he sure as hell did love her back. But in that moment the shock of her confession

was paralysing him. "You've never said that to me before." He said eventually as if she wouldn't have already known that.

"Well there's a first time for everything."

At last her words seemed to spur him into action. He strode towards her, reaching her in two large steps, he grabbed the sides of her face in both of his hands and kissed her passionately. His energy caused her to knock into the door loudly and he had no doubt the sound would have been enough for the other residents of the building to look up from their desks. No doubt he'd be subjected to more knowing looks when he emerged from his office later. Joyce responded to the kiss with equal vigour; stretching up onto her tiptoes to meet his greedy mouth and leaning her body forward until all of her curves were pressing against him.

"I love you too... obviously..." Hopper all but gasped as he finally pulled back from her, just enough to breath properly and as soon as he had said the words his lips descended on hers again. She laughed against his mouth. Yes, she supposed it was quite obvious all things considered. "Does this mean..." He interrupted his own sentence by kissing her again. The kisses had turned rather sloppy by that stage due to all the laughing and heavy breathing in-between but he didn't stop. "Does this mean we can tell people now?.." Another kiss. "The kids at least if no one else?" Kiss.

"Let's tell them tonight. When you come to pick up Jane."

Those words finally made him pause. He'd agreed to keep it between the two of them at start because Joyce had been so adamant about it. He knew that she was still healing from everything that had happened in the last couple of years and that whatever this was between them needed to be on her terms. And selfishly he rather enjoyed having her all to himself in moments like this. But he was also desperate to tell the kids so he could stop having to physically restrain himself from touching her and kissing her when in their presence.

"Okay. Tonight." Hopper agreed quickly.

"I'm going to go now before you try and ravish me on your desk."

Joyce told him, the playful spark in her eyes impossible to ignore. He raised an eyebrow at the suggestion – now there was an idea. "No way – the lock on this door is crap and I am so not getting caught by Flo and judged for forever more."

"Fair point." He smirked at her. He mentally noted that her only objection seemed to be the likely possibility of getting caught. He also mentally noted to go down to the hardware store at the earliest opportunity to pick up a new door lock. "See you tonight." He told her as she opened the door from behind her.

"Tonight."

She smiled at him and with that she was gone.